Environment Canada | Environnement Canada

Into the Mainstream

Strategies for a Secure Environment

Canada

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l'affaire de tous

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The mandate of the Department of the Environment is to protect the life-support systems on which Canadians depend: clean air, fresh water, healthy soil. An essential part of our task is to present ideas to all interested organizations and individuals with an eye to ensuring that efforts are coherent and effective.

The need for action on the environment has never been more urgent. As the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (the "Brundtland Report") makes clear, environmental factors can no longer be separated from economic decisions. If we continue to trash our environment, the economy — and, ultimately, the planet and all other life forms, including the human race itself — will perish.

The Brundtland Report offers an alternative to the no-growth option traditionally trotted out to save the environment. Essentially, the "sustainable development" concept means not stealing from our children and children yet to come: resources should be managed in a way that takes into account not only their present value but their future worth as well.

Canada was one of the Brundtland Commission's earliest and strongest supporters. Indeed, we were one of only four countries world-wide to host the Commissioners as they conducted their studies and hearings. Since then, the subject has been elevated to the top of the Canadian political agenda. As a follow-up to Brundtland, the Canadian Council of Resource and Environment Ministers established a Task Force to consider the Commission's recommendations. For their part, the Prime Minister and all ten Premiers placed it on their work program at last November's meeting of First Ministers, and they will deal with it when they meet again in the fall. Canadians themselves have consistently told pollsters they want action and are prepared to pay the price for it. Politicians of all political stripes appear, at last, to be responding.

To encourage discussion and consultation on the environment, I am pleased to present **Into the Mainstream,** which suggests ways to achieve sustainable development — conservation, prevention, adaptation, and cleanup. Major obstacles that must be overcome to meet those objectives are also discussed.

The publication lays out three challenges that have to be addressed if environmental decisions are to be integrated into economic ones: broadening involvement, overcoming barriers, and resolving conflicts. Finally, strategies necessary to meet the challenges and to attain overall aims are highlighted: promoting knowledge and awareness; reinforcing good practices; and fostering dialogue among concerned groups and individuals.

Responsibility for our shared environment is not the preserve of any one group or sector, be it government, industry, or non-government organizations. If we have learned anything in the past quarter-century, it is this: we are all

stewards of the environment. Accordingly, **Into the Mainstream** attempts to assist every interested party to answer the questions "Where do we fit in?" and "How can we help?"

For nearly 30 years, governments have set goals and tried to co-ordinate efforts to improve the quality of the environment. However important the role of government may be, that of individuals in their home communities is vital. So, the success of the Brundtland revolution will depend on getting the message out to those who can lead it.

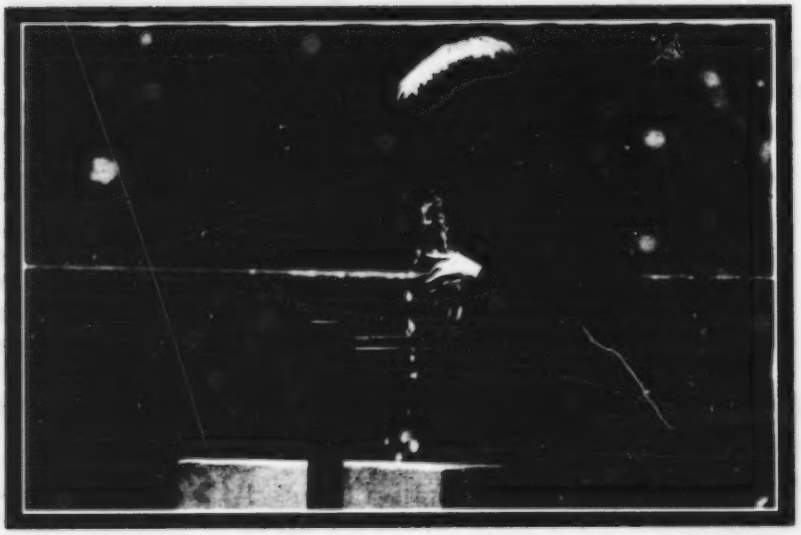
As American anthropologist Dr. Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a group of committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Sincerely,

Tom McMillan, P.C., M.P.,
Minister of the Environment

1

Introduction



We live in a fundamentally different world from that of our parents. In the span of a few short decades we have witnessed major shifts in the scope and nature of environmental problems both in Canada and around the world.

Consider the following sobering thoughts:

- **For the first time in the history of this planet, people have the capacity to significantly affect and alter the global environment.**

  Acid rain, accidents involving nuclear energy, or the release of chemicals can threaten air, land and water halfway around the world. Consumption and production practices which are seemingly insignificant at the individual level are now understood to have profound immediate, long-term and cumulative harmful effects on the health of our planet. Massive deforestation, burning of fossil fuels, and use of certain chemicals in ordinary household products are leading to potential long-term global changes.

- **Environmental problems are more complex than ever before.**

  Several decades ago, it was relatively straightforward to deal with the black smoke and air pollution hanging over our larger cities. But now we recognize that the solutions that gave us cleaner air in our cities gave us dirty rain over our countryside. As well, the increased use of chemicals in our industries has introduced complex challenges. There are now more than 100 000 chemical substances in commercial use. Most were introduced in the past few decades. An additional thousand or more products and industrial processes are being introduced every year, challenging our capacity to assess impacts and establish storage and disposal procedures.

- **Environmental problems and threats are now hitting closer to home.**

  We now see real or potential environmental dangers in our own homes, places of employment and communities. Many Canadians feel that environmental impacts such as contamination of drinking water, toxins in food, acid rain and air pollution have an effect on their families' health. Population growth in certain regions of Canada has contributed to unprecedented pressures on natural ecosystems and local resource bases. Resource development in public parks, more costly residential and recreational land, and the loss of prime agricultural land near major urban centres are obvious cases. We are concerned about our very ability to sustain our current quality of life.

At the same time, there is in Canada an unprecedented willingness and capacity to take positive action on environmental issues.

Consider the following encouraging facts:

- **One of the most significant and dramatic shifts in the values & priorities of Canadians in the post-war era has been the emergence of environmental issues at the top of the national agenda.**

  Concerns about the environment now consistently rank on a par with unemployment and the economy. We Canadians are not fatalistic about our environmental problems. Instead, we consistently demand decisive leadership and responsible action on environmental issues. We also declare that we are willing to make personal sacrifices to maintain and improve the quality of our environment.

- **Over the past few decades we have built a solid base for action on environmental issues.**

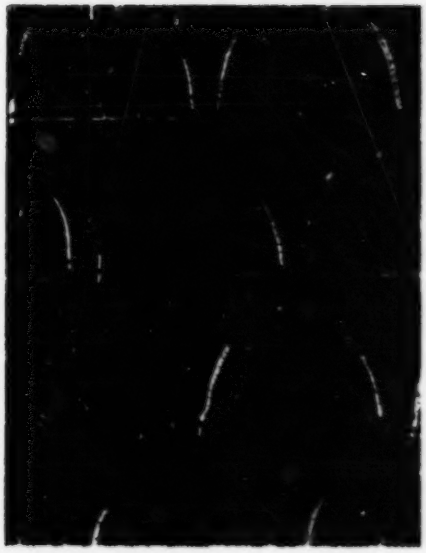
  Domestically, and through our international affiliations, we have acquired considerable knowledge and experience in dealing with environmental issues. Whereas a department or ministry of the environment was virtually unheard of 20 years ago, there is now a well-developed core of scientists and environmental management expertise at the international, federal, provincial, territorial and municipal levels. Voluntary organizations — which have grown from a handful in the 1960s to several hundred today — enjoy a high degree of credibility amongst Canadians. They have served to keep environmental issues on the national agenda, while contributing substantial technical expertise. Many firms and industry associations have established environmental departments, as have universities and labour organizations. At the individual and family level, never before have so many Canadians been so willing and able to do something to improve their environment.

- **There is a growing awareness of the fact that a healthy economy needs a healthy environment.**

  Perhaps more than any other industrialized nation, Canada's vibrant economy and superb quality of life are based directly on the quality of our natural environment. Our sense of identity as a nation and our international image are closely linked to our rich, clean environment. Our major industries — forestry, agriculture, mining, tourism, fishing — are based on resources and environmental amenities. There is now a growing appreciation that economic growth is short-lived and illusory if it undermines or squanders the

resources and ecosystems upon which it is based. This realization is serving to engage the interest of key industrial decision-makers in environmental issues.

Taking advantage of our experience and strengths, we have made considerable progress in recent years in many areas of environmental concern. On balance, however, it is clear that we still have far to go. As we tackle the list of formidable environmental challenges, it may be helpful to take a hard look at our traditional approaches and assumptions. Already, two important themes are emerging that point the way for a fresh look at how we think of, and respond to, environmental problems:



1. A Common Understanding of our Environmental Goals

We are active in many aspects of the environment, and at a variety of levels. We need to ensure that these activities are properly integrated, balanced and coordinated. To do so requires a better understanding of our environmental goals and how they are interlinked.

2. Integration of Environmental Concerns Into Daily Decisions and Practices

Until recently, environmental issues were the active concern of only a narrow element of society. The environmental impact of daily decisions were not fully understood, nor were environmental issues yet fully ingrained in the daily decisions of industry, government and consumers. With the increasing involvement of many Canadians, we are bringing environment into the mainstream of decision-making.

This paper draws together recent thinking and experiences on our common environmental goals. It also suggests some actions to help us work together more effectively, in our communities, workplaces and governments, to achieve these goals.

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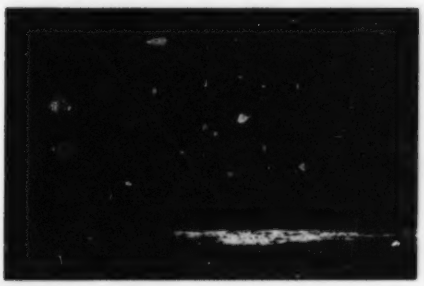
From within our communities to beyond our international borders, we Canadians have worked hard to protect the environment.

As we seek solutions to a new generation of environmental challenges, we should not lose sight of the achievements we have made on many fronts. We have been among world leaders in reducing threats to the global environment. Industries, community groups and individuals have joined governments in responding to problems and opportunities.

For example, we can boast of a network of national and provincial parks that is the envy of the world. Over the years, we have put in place a sophisticated weather forecasting system which relies upon satellites, radars, land-and sea-based observing stations as well as hundreds of volunteer weather watchers across the country. Certain soil conservation practices are now in common use, thanks to the efforts of soil scientists and farmers. One of the most comprehensive land surveys in the world, the Canada Land Inventory, has contributed to sound land use planning in all regions. We have moved quickly to protect unique and endangered ecosystems, such as South Moresby Island in British Columbia, and areas of the high Arctic. We have formed broad coalitions to preserve wildlife habitat — as in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Across the country, scores of communities have launched recycling programs to conserve resources and reduce pressures on waste disposal sites.



Major steps are also underway to tackle more immediate environmental threats. Joint efforts involving government and industry are cleaning up toxic chemical disposal sites, such as the Sysco tar ponds in Sydney, Nova Scotia. We have also moved quickly to reduce sources of acid rain. The new Canadian Environmental Protection Act provides for tough regulations governing the safe development, storage and disposal of existing and new chemical products. A new Canada-United States treaty will provide a comprehensive approach to cleaning up the Great Lakes, addressing not only site-specific industrial pollution sources, but broader-based concerns as well, such as pesticide use and run-off from city storm sewers. And Canada was host to a recent conference that led to the first international agreement to protect the earth's ozone layer.

"Security" is the common thread running through our efforts to preserve environmental quality.

We should not see these wide-ranging environmental clean-up, conservation and protection efforts as isolated actions. They are linked, though perhaps we do not always consider the connections as much as we should. Whether at the community or international level, our actions share a common goal: a sense of security. We want to feel safe. We want to be healthy. We want to be prosperous and productive. And we want to know that our children and grandchildren will inherit a world where they, too, can enjoy these things.

Our common mission is this:

TO ACHIEVE AND MAINTAIN A SECURE ENVIRONMENT

A secure environment acknowledges the strong links between people and their natural environment.

We have come to recognize that there can be no strict divisions between human activities and aspirations, and the natural environment. The World Commission on Environment and Development, known as the Brundtland Commission, eloquently described the links between a healthy environment and a sound economy under the concept of sustainable development. A secure environment begins with this understanding. There are two interconnected concerns of a secure environment:

- the long-term integrity of our natural ecosystems; and
- the economic and social well-being of the people who live within this natural environment.

Our actions must take into account the safety, health and productivity of both dimensions. Our policies must be judged according to how they minimize threats and maximize benefits to each. This means that, in many cases, extreme positions are not acceptable. Instead, a proper balance must be struck between preservation and development.

To achieve the goal of a secure environment will require action in the four key areas of environmental management:

1. CLEAN-UP
2. CONSERVATION
3. PREVENTION
4. ADAPTATION

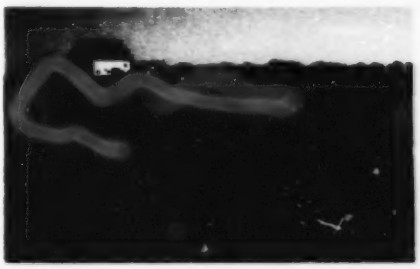
We cannot look at each of these four as separate efforts. Instead, we will need to give greater attention to how they can be put to work in a coordinated, consistent and mutually-reinforcing fashion.
It will be useful to take a brief look at how well we are doing in each of the four areas, and see what work remains to be done before we achieve a truly secure environment.

1. CLEAN-UP

Clean-up — especially the immediate response to emergencies — is a familiar aspect of environmental protection. In a secure environment, clean-up involves several important elements:

- quick arrest and containment of both human-made threats (e.g. toxic spills) and certain natural threats (e.g. floods)
- restoration of areas damaged by accidents or past activities, and
- fair and timely assistance to individuals or communities disrupted by environmental accidents or newly recognized threats.

Much of our recent clean-up, though clearly necessary, has focused on environmental crises only when they occur. We have tended to act only when the risk has become visible or demonstrated, as in the cases of PCBs and dioxins. Our actions have generally been dedicated to immediate containment and clean-up of toxic spills, as opposed to other forms of environmental degradation. In a sense, problems have overtaken us, creating a backlog of urgent clean-up needs.



As we move towards a secure environment, our clean-up efforts will need to:

- improve efforts to implement on-going, routine clean-up so as to prevent future emergencies
- systematically identify and tackle the backlog of existing clean-up requirements, respecting local, regional and national priorities
- pay greater attention to restoration and rejuvenation of areas affected either by toxic spills or by past commercial activity
- improve legal and other assistance measures to provide equitable and timely help for persons affected by environmental accidents.

2. CONSERVATION

Conservation is, like clean-up, probably familiar to most of us. Saving energy in our homes or preserving wildlife habitat in remote areas are well-known examples. For a secure environment, conservation must meet one fundamental condition:

- wise and efficient management and use of renewable and non-renewable resources.

While important conservation measures are already well established in Canada, some shortcomings remain. We still too often consume our non-renewable resources and manage our most precious and rare renewable resources like there's no tomorrow. For example, agricultural soils in some regions are still not being adequately maintained for sustainable use. Reforestation is still not as widely practised as it could be. There are still too many examples of wasteful use of clean, fresh water in some industries and cities. Conserving resources is still regarded by many as being incompatible with economic growth and job creation, rather than a necessary condition for continued growth and prosperity over the longer-term. Moreover, we still tend to see our individual consumption practices as having no real consequence, and do not appreciate the collective drain we are imposing on our finite and fragile resource base.

Future conservation efforts will need to pay attention to three critical areas:

- broaden the idea of conservation to embrace all facets of our economy and culture as well as continuing to protect critical habitats and species
- in addition to conserving critical resources, take into account the interrelationships among them, including conflicts in use
- overcome the notion still held by some people that conservation is incompatible with economic growth, through greater attention to long-term, sustainable productivity.

3. PREVENTION

In the long-term it is much more efficient to anticipate and prevent potential environmental threats than to take remedial steps only after an emergency. The challenge for a secure environment will be:

- adoption of individual, social and corporate attitudes and practices which minimize the occurrence of environmental problems.

Much of the preventive action to date has focused on the most immediate threats to life or health, and frequently only as a reaction to clean-up. There has not been a general understanding that, over the long-term, it is far less costly to anticipate and prevent potential threats than to try to cure them after they appear. There has also been the more subtle problem of promoting the value of ongoing prevention efforts that are only noticed when they fail to work.

Before we can truly achieve a secure environment, prevention efforts will need to be strengthened in three key ways:

- increase our capacity to anticipate and prevent potential threats
- broaden the concept beyond immediate threats to life and property to include concern for quality of life (including better health, peace of mind, reduced exposure to risk, etc.)
- increase attention to more subtle cumulative and longer-term threats to health and safety.

4. ADAPTATION

The notions of adapting and coping are not yet common to environmental management. But they must take their place alongside the more familiar elements of clean-up, conservation and prevention, if we are to achieve our goal of a secure environment. Two concerns are crucial:

- anticipation of, and planning for new or potential threats and environmental trends
- adaptation to, and coping with environmental realities which are beyond our capacity, or our willingness, to change.

Our efforts to date have largely focused on providing information to respond to relatively short-term events, including weather forecasts, flood warnings and pollution index readings. We have paid relatively little attention to the larger-scale and more long-term factors which will require fundamental adaptation and copin such as long-term climatic changes, resource depletion, population pressures, and exposure to environmental risks. Adapting and coping do not involve passively accepting things as they are; rather, they call for positive action to make the best of our environmental realities.

Greater attention must be given to adapting and coping with environmental trends and realities. This will mean:

- turning our attention to long-term, macro-scale environmental trends, even though their impacts may not be felt until well into the future
- coming to terms with environmental trends and realities which we cannot change or choose not to change, by shifting our emphasis from adapting the environment to adapting to the environment
- better equipping individuals and communities to cope with environmental realities.

3

The fundamental challenge is to bring environmental concerns into the mainstream of our thinking and decision-making.

Three formidable factors constrain our current approach to tackling environmental problems:

- Environmental issues have been the active concern of only a narrow element of society. The powerful environmental impacts of daily decisions are not fully understood. Nor are environmental concerns ingrained into individual, corporate and governmental decision-making.
- Many financial, social and cultural barriers militate against sound environmental decision-making.
- There are inevitable conflicts in values and choices regarding environmental and other broad objectives.

The basic challenge of achieving a secure environment is to bring environmental considerations into the mainstream of our daily decisions, as individuals, and in our businesses and governments. A secure environment brings environmental issues to the decision-making table on an equal footing with conventional factors such as economic, social and cultural considerations.

We cannot simply do more of the same.

Bringing environmental concerns into the mainstream of decision-making calls for a fundamental shift in attitudes and practices at all levels.

Despite the successes of the recent past, it is clear that such a basic shift will not occur on its own. Root causes of environmental problems cannot be addressed simply by throwing at them more money and more programs. We cannot be satisfied with doing more of the same. A re-thinking of our traditional approach to solving environmental problems is in order.

Three challenges will be at the core of this new approach.

1. **BROADEN INVOLVEMENT**
2. **OVERCOME BARRIERS**
3. **RESOLVE CONFLICTS**

1. BROADEN INVOLVEMENT

We're all environmentalists now. In a world of Bhopal, acid rain and the energy crisis, no one can abdicate environmental responsibilities.

No longer can we let environmental "experts" solve our problems. Successful responses to environmental challenges must involve a wide range of actors, including individuals, industries and government agencies who may not be used to dealing directly with environmental concerns. We need to engage the cooperation, support and commitment of those who are in the best position to influence policies and practices. With broader public, industrial and government involvement will come greater accountability for decisions affecting the environment, as well as a greater commitment and more effective utilization of our national resources.

2. OVERCOME ECONOMIC & SOCIAL BARRIERS

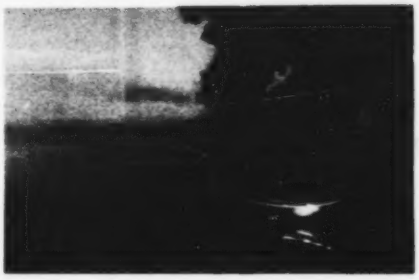
We need to establish a level playing field. Otherwise, economic and social pressures will continue to outweigh concern for the environment.

Viewing environmental problems and threats as the result of "bad actors", "avarice" and "bad faith" is simplistic and ultimately self-defeating. We need to recognize that many of the daily decisions made by consumers, industry and government departments are a direct and in many cases inevitable result of established economic and social norms, practices and influences. To a very large extent, our environmental problems are a reflection of our fundamental economic and social systems. For example, our market pricing mechanisms as presently structured cannot adequately account for environmental risks and costs — many of which are difficult to assess because of their technical complexity, and long-term or cumulative nature. Similarly, consumer decisions often reflect deep-rooted values and expectations which make it difficult to reconcile environmental impacts. We need to offset and overcome these barriers in order to integrate environmental concerns into mainstream decision-making.

3. RESOLVE CONFLICTS

For something as important as the environment, conflicts in values and priorities are inevitable. What we need are better ways to identify and address these conflicts.

By definition, choices between one environmental objective and another, or between environmental concerns on the one hand and economic, social or cultural concerns on the other, involve conflicts and trade-offs. They must be resolved in a fair and timely fashion to achieve a truly secure environment. Even with the best of intentions, these conflicts cannot always be resolved in the courts or in the marketplace. Given the mutual stakes in a secure environment, we need to provide more accessible, less costly and more cooperative mechanisms to address inherent conflicts related to the environment.



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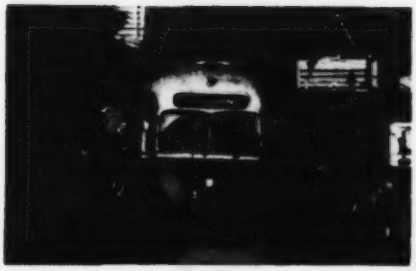
The fundamental challenge to achieving a secure environment is to shift environmental factors into the mainstream of our decision-making. But understanding the challenge is not enough. We must introduce new ideas and innovative approaches into the entire spectrum of our lives, from how we run our individual households, to the way we manage our national and international affairs. Even the way in which we try to solve problems must change. Narrow, isolated responses are no longer adequate. We must recognize the real roots of environmental problems, and accept our shared responsibility for solving them. We will need to work alongside other people — people who might well have been on the opposite side of the table in the past.

We can organize our efforts under three broad strategies:

1. **PROMOTING KNOWLEDGE & AWARENESS**
2. **REINFORCING GOOD PRACTICES**
3. **FOSTERING DIALOGUE**

The three strategies are, of course, closely related, and will work best in a coordinated approach. Each addresses, to one degree or another, the three challenges outlined in the previous section.

The lists of possible actions under each strategy are long, and rich with opportunities for all of us. Some promising initiatives have already begun, and we will need to learn from these and maintain their momentum. On other challenges, we will be breaking new ground.



1. PROMOTING KNOWLEDGE & AWARENESS

The starting point is knowledge. With informed choice come concern and commitment.

If Canadians — industry, consumers and governments alike — are to begin thinking environmentally, they will need a better understanding of the environmental consequences of their options and decisions. As well, individual and collective values and attitudes need to be made more sensitive to environmental concerns.

Here are some of the ways we can begin promoting increased understanding and awareness of environmental issues:

- **Greater attention to environmental issues in our school curricula is an essential step.**

  Informed choice begins with education of our young people. Governments, industries and voluntary groups can prepare materials for all levels in our schools. Information kits, videos, workshops and on-site visits all can help increase awareness of, and sensitivity to environmental issues and conflicts. For example, a network of educators, environmental organizations and governments has prepared and distributed high school curricula materials on energy, life cycle management of toxic chemicals, and acid rain.

- **State of the Environment reports are another important tool.**

  Periodic State of the Environment reports, prepared by the federal government, give a report card "grade" to how well we are managing various aspects of our environment. In the most recent report, for example, our efforts to protect water quality were given a grade C-minus; urban air quality received a B-minus; and soil quality a C-minus. The report highlights recent successful initiatives, and flags issues for immediate and future action, such as loss of prime farmland to urban development, depletion of the ozone layer and municipal waste management.

- **Industry associations can increase public awareness and assist member companies.**

  Several industries with strong environmental links have established associations to convey particular concerns to governments and the public. The petroleum industry, for example, has set up a task force to recommend improvements for identifying and handling leakage from underground storage tanks. Associations could also consider publishing their own State of the Industry reports to generate increased awareness of companies' activities, as well as to encourage broader discussion of new problems or constraints. Finally, associations have a unique opportunity to pool the experience of their members to assist smaller firms which may lack the resources or expertise to tackle environmental problems on their own.

- **Voluntary organizations are important educators and advocates.**

  Public interest groups serve to keep environmental issues to the fore, monitoring progress, advising governments and publicizing concerns. Consumer groups, for example, have paid special attention to the potential long-term health effects of certain food additives, and have urged more widespread product labelling so that individual buyers can be better informed about what they are consuming.

2. REINFORCING GOOD PRACTICES

We need to make environmentally-sensitive choices the natural and obvious choices.

We need to put into place the right mixture of incentives and sanctions — the proverbial carrot and stick. These will encourage and reinforce the kinds of decisions and practices that take proper account of environmental factors, while discouraging those decisions and practices that undermine our environmental security.

Here are some of the ways we can begin encouraging and rewarding good practices:

- **The right mix of financial incentives can encourage greater attention to environmental impacts.**

  Businesses respond quickly to new opportunities. Financial levers can create new incentives to invest in improved, cleaner technology and to introduce other changes that promote more effective

environmental prevention or conservation. The tools could include investment tax credits, reduced interest bonds, and credits for exceeding established standards. At the company level, a plant's environmental quality record could be introduced as one element in the staff evaluations of the plant management, creating an immediate incentive to pay greater attention to resource conservation and prevention measures.

- **The true costs of some resources may need to be brought onto the conventional balance sheet.**

  Certain resources, such as clean water from a river or lake for industrial processes, may be undervalued in the sense that they are available for free or only a nominal charge. This can lead to a wasteful overuse. User charges and other financial mechanisms could be introduced to more accurately reflect the full environmental costs of using the resource. This can encourage more efficient use of the resource, and ensure proper attention to long-term quality.

- **New computer software programs could help planners test-run ideas and factor in environmental impacts as a normal part of doing business.**

  Computer-assisted-design applications already support senior decision-makers in business and government on a range of economic and social policy issues. Yet there has been little effort to incorporate environmental factors into computer-assisted decision-making. Existing environmental databases and computer models of the transport of air pollutants, water and soil quality and other factors could be tapped in test runs of a proposed plant or technology. The test runs would provide typical profiles of emissions and other environmental consequences of the proposed work before final decisions are made. These software programs could help give environmental factors equal standing with conventional factors in normal business decision-making.

- **"Buy Clean" campaigns are powerful signals for businesses.**

  One way in which individuals can make a difference in environmental quality is through "dollar power", what they choose to buy and what they leave on the shelf. "Buy Clean" campaigns, organized by consumer groups, can publicize efforts by a business or industry that enhance prospects for a secure environment. For example, one fast food restaurant chain has decided to stop using [redacted] packaging material which contains chemicals known to deplete the earth's protective ozone layer. A chemical manufacturer may have demonstrated leadership in introducing the industry to safer life-cycle management of a new chemical. "Buy Clean" campaigns could focus attention on these companies and encourage consumers to buy their products as a show of support. Governments and business have opportunities to participate in "Buy Clean" activities, as well, through targeting their own purchasing and procurement policies.

- **Environmental service awards are another incentive.**

  Awards could focus public recognition and generate support for those individuals and businesses showing leadership in improving environmental quality. They may even carry more prestige if they are awarded not by governments or particular groups, but by independent broad-based associations and organizations.

- **In extreme cases, the threat of sanctions or fines may be the only practical way to encourage good environmental decisions.**

  Sometimes incentives, awards and other positive signals will not be enough to affect a particular company or group. More drastic steps may be in order. For example, the federal government recently introduced the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, which contains tough penalties and fines for companies failing to properly manage toxic chemicals. Some provinces are following suit. Another sanction is consumer boycotts of firms which have failed to respond to an urgent environmental matter. Voluntary groups have also set up negative "polluter of the year" awards.

3. FOSTERING DIALOGUE

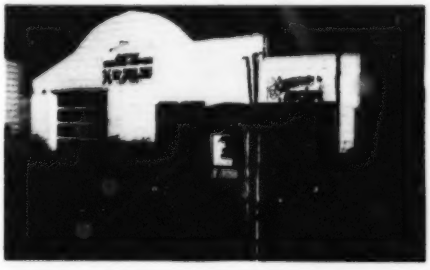
The days of drawing lines are over; an era of drawing connections must begin.

Effective responses to immediate environmental threats and to longer-term shifts in practices require cooperative effort. To address conflicts more fairly and effectively and to marshal our collective national resources for environmental action, we must build new and better mechanisms for consultation and collaboration. There is an urgent need to explore ways to help us better understand one another, to share perspectives and even fears of one another, and to find common ground for joint action.

Here are some initial ideas on ways to begin fostering a more dynamic and positive dialogue on our environmental challenges:

- **Innovative partnerships among groups need to be established to tackle environmental challenges.**

  Some partnerships already have been formed. The Canadian Council of Resource and Environment Ministers recently established the National Task Force on Environment and Economy. The task force included representatives who have been on opposite sides of environmental issues in the past: government ministers; senior executives from resource-based companies; and leaders of environmental groups. It proposed



sweeping recommendations in how governments and business take into account potential environmental impacts, and urged far greater attention be placed on the links between a strong economy and a healthy environment.

- **"Round Tables" can continue the momentum in all regions of the country.**

  One of the most exciting recommendations of the National Task Force on Environment and Economy's report was the establishment of permanent round table forums. "Round Tables" could act as ongoing mechanisms for exchanging concerns, finding areas of common ground, and seeking approaches that are understood and respected by all sides. Set up at a national level, as well as in every region, "Round Tables" would bring to one table senior decision-makers from industry, labour, government, citizen groups, education, health, the science and justice communities and other fields. They would be high-profile examples of the kind of dialogue and cooperation needed to tackle a new generation of environmental challenges. They also would provide credible, publicized early warning signals of new concerns that will demand our attention.

- **Cooperation at the international level can be strengthened.**

  Canada has been among the leaders in seeking new international approaches to environmental problems which respect no boundaries, such as acid rain and depletion of the ozone layer. Major efforts are underway in cooperation with the United States to clean up the Great Lakes and preserve waterfowl habitat. Yet more needs to be done. Ideas worth exploring include: more scientific exchanges with other countries; establishment of multinational North American and Arctic Round Tables; and a world environmental court to resolve environmental conflicts between nations.

- **Greater use of informal executive interchanges would help build consensus on environmental problems.**

  One- or two-year exchanges among senior executives in government and the private sector already occur in a few public policy areas in Canada. The practice is more established in the United States and Western Europe. An expansion of the concept to focus on environmental issues could be one valuable initiative of the round table experiment. Universities, for example, could offer chairs in environmental affairs in their business schools, and invite senior executives of resource companies and government policy-makers. A company, in turn, could hire senior government planners to help prepare environmental policy guidelines or State of the Industry reports.

- **Citizen diplomacy brings consensus-building to the grassroots, community level.**

  Groups of individuals frequently find themselves on opposite sides of an environmental conflict. Residents of a particular town, for example, may be angered by the water pollution created by an old mill in the next town upstream.

Meanwhile, the people who work in the mill cannot understand why some people want to take away their jobs and shut down their town. Each group considers the other selfish and insensitive. We have few established forums for resolving such complex conflicts involving individual values. Citizen diplomacy is a new technique which tries to bring together individuals from opposite sides of a dispute, free from any public forum or formal government setting. The goals are to reduce "finger-pointing" and tensions, to reinforce the need for shared responsibility, and to seek comprehensive solutions that respect the needs of both groups. Citizen diplomacy initiatives are underway in several Scandinavian countries and in the United States.
For example, one project involves the pairing of two hundred residents of the heavily industrialized Ohio Valley, considered a major source of acid rain, with an equal number of New England residents, whose towns and forests are seriously affected by acid rain. A few such projects involving environmental conflicts in several regions of the country could test the idea in a Canadian setting, and offer valuable lessons for future citizen diplomacy efforts.

- **Voluntary environmental groups can use their hard-won (and well-deserved) credibility to reach out to other citizens.**

A secure environment requires the active participation of a much wider range of groups than has been the case until now. Voluntary organizations experienced with environmental issues have a unique opportunity to bring these groups to the table. Voluntary groups are trusted by the general public. They can provide valuable information free from any supposed government or industry bias. They are in a special position to encourage and support the active participation of people not familiar or even comfortable with environmental problems.

- **We should experiment with greater use of conflict resolution efforts, such as environmental mediation.**

Occasionally, environmental conflicts reach an impasse. Negotiations, round tables, and other mechanisms have been tried without success. Neither side of the dispute wants costly court action. In these cases, both sides could agree to send their dispute to an independent mediator or tribunal. The mediator provides a neutral, objective view of the dispute. The mediator's ruling need not be binding, although it can be if both sides agree beforehand. Mediation often brings a useful "cooling off" period for both sides, as well. As a last resort to litigation or government-imposed rulings, mediation is familiar to us in the context of labour-management disputes. Yet its application to environmental problem-solving has been very limited in Canada. It deserves further attention. The "Niagara Process", a set of principles and protocols for consultations among all stakeholders, is another tool worth exploring. It has been applied successfully on a number of recent complex problems, including the multi-stakeholder Task Force on Chemicals Management, the Environmental Contaminants Act Amendments Consultative Committee, and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act consultations.

5

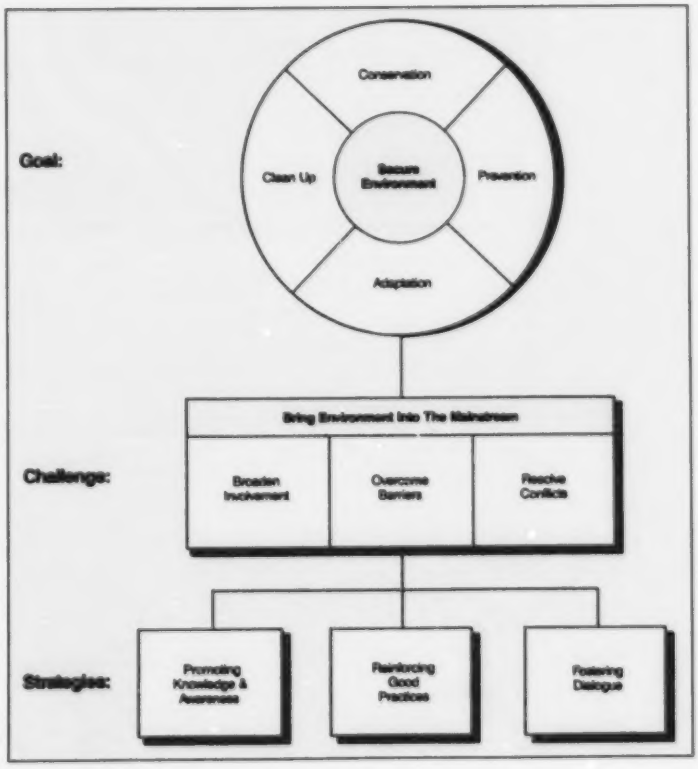
We begin with the goal of a secure environment.

The illustration on this page summarizes the concepts presented here and shows how they are related. We have suggested that Canadians share a common goal, namely, to achieve and maintain a secure environment. This requires concerted action in four broad and mutually-reinforcing areas: clean-up and restoration; conservation and wise use of renewable and non-renewable resources; prevention of future problems; and adaptation to, and coping with, environmental limits and realities.

Canadians have made considerable progress in matters relating to environmental management, but we cannot rest content with our current approaches. Environmental considerations must be brought into the mainstream of everyday decision-making. This is not a simple task.

Three challenges are involved: broadening the involvement of individuals and organizations in environmental concerns; overcoming the social and economic barriers to environmentally-sound practices; and developing more effective mechanisms to address and resolve conflicts.

Tackling these challenges calls for collective action on three strategic fronts: promoting knowledge and awareness of environmental consequences; reinforcing environmentally-sound practices; and fostering greater dialogue amongst all concerned. The list of possible actions is rich with opportunities for all of us.



We can build on the momentum of recent successes. It is a job worthy of Canada and of Canadians.

Only two more things are needed to breathe life into these concepts: leadership and commitment.

- **There will be a need for leadership at all levels.**

  Understanding and consensus are starting points. There is still a need for leadership to direct our efforts at all levels to achieve a secure environment. The effort to shape new attitudes, the ranking of research priorities, the establishment of new partnerships — all will require impetus and direction. In some cases, governments may be the most appropriate leaders. In others, industry, consumers and voluntary organizations will properly take a leadership role.

- **It is time to put our declared commitment into action.**

  The cliché happens to be correct: actions do speak louder than words. Individuals, industries and governments will need to bring environment into the mainstream. In recent years, we have been telling opinion-takers that we are willing to bear temporary disruptive changes in exchange for the longer-term benefits of a healthier, more secure environment. It is time for all of us to begin demonstrating this declaration in our daily lives.